SQUADRON OFFICER COLLEGE
14C THINK TANK GROUP 3

THE SACRIFICE OF INTEGRITY IN THE PURSUIT OF "EXCELLENCE"

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The recent publicity surrounding the missileer cheating scandal at Malmstrom Air Force Base has brought national attention to the Air Force's failure to adhere to its own Core Values of "Integrity First, Service Before Self, Excellence In All We Do." What was lost in the initial headlines, which only focused on the fact that missileers systematically cheated on their evaluations, was the main driving force behind why those individuals made the choices that they made. It only later became clear that their commanders were demanding perfection, and – perhaps inadvertently or even deliberately – ignoring clear signs of cheating. While this is the most recent and visible scandal, evidence indicates that this "crisis" is just the tip of the iceberg—what else needs to happen for the Air Force to take this problem seriously enough to try to understand its root cause and implement the necessary measures to address it?

This paper analyzes numerous deviations from the behavior expected of service members in the Air Force and whether those deviations are isolated events, unique to a unit or career field, or if the trends and themes found in studying those deviations point to a Service culture that rewards "perfection" at the expense of integrity. This paper questions whether the priorities of the Service are in line with its Core Values given the current fiscal climate, where Airmen are being forced to do more with less resources while performing increasingly demanding duties.

Using qualitative research methodology, this paper examines the background and conclusions found in the Malmstrom CDI. From interviews of company grade officers (CGOs), senior noncommissioned officers (SNCOs), and current and former commanders, it also evaluates whether there is a common understanding within the Service of how the Core Values should be applied to the mission and whether the priorities set by the organizational leadership are carried out in manners consistent with the Core Values.

SECTION I. INTRODUCTION

Recent violations of the Air Force Core Values by Airmen at all grades have caused some observers to question the moral and ethical health of the Service. In May 2013, 17 Air Force training instructors at Lackland Air Force Base were convicted of misconduct with trainees that ranged from unprofessional relationships to sexual assault (Associated Press, 2013). Just eight months after those convictions, the Secretary of the Air Force and the Commander, Air Force Global Strike Command (AFGSC) announced that a cheating scandal involving 92 missileers took place at Malmstrom Air Force Base (Michaels, 2014). Directly preceding and following those incidents was a 2012 United States Air Force Academy cheating scandal in the math department that involved 78 cadets and an ongoing investigation into a potential cheating scandal involving 40 cadets in the chemistry department. In order to address these moral crises, there must be a cultural change in the Service—driven by a recommitment to the Core Values.

Consequently, development of an individual's character begins during early childhood. Parents' behaviors influence those of their children as they age by instilling sets of values in them by which to live. Educational institutions reinforce the character traits and values of those individuals as they continue into adulthood. The Air Force is designed to be a microcosm of society; therefore, it is faced with the challenge of building upon that foundation after the individual enters the Service. By preaching "Integrity First, Service Before Self, and Excellence In All We Do," the Air Force is in theory an ideal place for individuals to develop their characters. However, in practice, there is significant evidence that the Service is failing in this capacity. The Core Values are often abused or misunderstood, which leads to various instances where breakdowns in integrity occur. This paper examines several of those in which the Air

Force culture has deviated from its Core Values. In addition, it addresses the actions that are necessary for the Service to align its culture with one that adheres to the Core Values.

The overarching theme of the case studies discussed below is a sacrifice of integrity in the pursuit of excellence. The discussion pursues a common understanding of the Core Values. A common understanding of Core Values is based upon a common definition of integrity as "doing what is right, despite the consequences." A second important aspect in understanding the Core Values is a shift in focus that leads to the primacy of integrity. This newly defined relationship is illustrated by an equilateral triangle with "Integrity First" at the pinnacle, as well as Service and Excellence at the base to support—not interfere with—Integrity. This construct shows us that the Core Values can only work effectively if they are all given equal attention.

Defining integrity in this manner acknowledges that risk is inherent in bold leadership and will make the concept applicable to more than just individual action, but to institutional action and leadership practices as well.

What this paper will not do is solve the problem entirely. The Air Force faces harsh realities of inflated evaluation systems, red tape that strains the ability to hold young Airmen accountable, and a dwindling budget that forces Airmen to do more with less. This climate exists within the context of a larger society that increasingly values achievement over integrity. For force structure to be aligned with mission requirements in order to reduce the tendency of Airmen to "cut corners" to get the job done, drastic changes in force management and resources are necessary. However, while those changes are necessary, the requirement for Congressional action pushes any recommended action outside the scope of this paper. Furthermore, while the development and reinforcement of virtuous standards of the recruiting pool, i.e. the American people, writ large would certainly assist the Service in addressing the current crises,

recommendations to change the moral and ethical makeup of American society are also outside the scope of this paper. Rather, this paper describes how the root causes of the public scandals and private embarrassments of the Air Force can be addressed. This paper recommends an actionable, sustainable, and effective course of action that provides CGOs through senior leaders the tools necessary to mitigate and minimize these issues—with which they can reinforce the true meaning of "Integrity First, Service Before Self, and Excellence In All We Do." By enacting the proposed course of action, the Service will become more committed to adherence to the Core Values.

This paper first examines the findings and conclusions found in the Malmstrom Commander Directed Investigation (CDI). It then analyzes multiple interviews and focus group discussions. Using qualitative research methodology, it uncovers trends that point to a pervasive problem in the Service—not necessarily an organization plagued by individual moral deviants, but just one struggling to balance conflicting priorities. Consequently, the evidence shows that, too often, the drive for perfection in the Air Force, or what is mistakenly alluded to as excellence, supersedes integrity. It also reveals that the focal point of the ethical climate within the Service is often the squadron commander, as leader of the most fundamental unit in the Service. Therefore, this paper provides a multi-pronged solution to realign the mission and the Core Values with emphasis on improving the moral health at the squadron level. It concludes by cautioning that even this solution is insufficient to fully rectify this problem or negate its impact on the Service. This is because senior leaders must ultimately be able to acknowledge that their Airmen are struggling, and this brings up the question of: with limited resources and high workload demands, what must give—Integrity, Service, or Excellence?

SECTION II. ASSUMPTIONS

While this paper uses substantiation of failures in leadership and violations of integrity to support the conclusions reached, some assumptions are necessary in order to understand the data evaluated. The first assumption is that the Service's Core Values are not the problem. Integrity, Service, and Excellence are attainable values, yet they inspire greater achievement. Because the values themselves are not the cause of the recently publicized scandals, there is no attempt to suggest a different set of values to replace or supplement them. Furthermore, it is assumed that despite the recent public nature of such scandals, violations of the Core Values are not a new challenge for the Service. Because of this, the paper does not address whether the current state of the Air Force is worse than in years or even generations past. It simply attempts to address the current issues. Also, while efforts to collect evidence from a wide cross section of the Service were taken, it is impossible to truly know whether the instances of integrity violations cited in this paper were isolated events or snapshots of a common occurrence that could be extrapolated to reflect the entire Air Force. While the below interviews, coming from a cross-section of various career fields, levels of experience and bases, are illustrative of the larger organizational problem, this paper recognizes that small, non-random sample has inherent limitations. Finally, while the goal of this paper is to mitigate, minimize, and diffuse, to the greatest extent possible, the causes of Core Value violations in the Air Force, it is assumed that no one solution will be able to eliminate all problems. While altering the behavior of individuals is the best way to change organizational behavior, there are resource limitations, and a need to acknowledge the fact that there will always be "bad apples" in all organizations, thereby preventing the Service from absolutely eliminating all violations of the Core Values. These assumptions have led to the advocacy of a multi-prong attack through use of which the Service can reenergize its force and

refocus its leadership to appropriately align mission accomplish with adherence to the Core Values.

SECTION III. EVIDENCE

A. Case Study 1: Malmstrom AFB Cheating Scandal

The Commander, AFGSC appointed the Vice Commander of Air Education and Training Command (AETC) to "conduct an investigation into the circumstances and causes that allowed the compromise of knowledge tests at Malmstrom AFB, Montana." This Command Directed Investigation (CDI) alleged that 98 Malmstrom AFB CGOs "compromised monthly knowledge tests by sharing answers with other officers who had yet to take the monthly knowledge tests and/or by failing to report others for doing so" (Baldor and Burns, 2014). The report concluded that 79 of 88 cases were substantiated, nine were unsubstantiated and ten remained under Air Force Office of Special Investigations (AFOSI) investigation, which placed them outside the scope of the CDI (Baldor and Burns, 2014).

The CDI identified a few characteristics within AFGSC and the 20th Air Force organizational cultures that affected testing, training, and evaluation in the missileer community. It reports that senior leaders "frequently emphasized their desire for an unrealistic and unobtainable 'zero defect' nuclear culture," where "perfection" was the standard (Baldor and Burns, 2014). It concludes that this expectation drove commanders at all levels to try to meet the standard "by personally monitoring and directing daily operations and imposing an unrelenting testing and evaluation regimen on wings, groups, squadrons and missile crew-members in an attempt to eliminate all human error" (Baldor and Burns, 2014). The CDI suggests that the unrealistic expectation of perfection and a relentless schedule of high-stakes outside inspections may have brought out the worst in leaders, who most likely were tempted to try to eliminate

errors by "imposing oppressive oversight, inspection, and testing regimes on organizations and personnel." The report also found that the current organizational culture and career development flow in missile wings incentivized new missileers "to score extremely well on monthly tests (100 percent) so that they can get 'off the line' and become an instructor or evaluator in the OSS [Operations Support Squadron] or OGV [Operations Group Standardizations and Evaluations] as quickly as they can, while performing the fewest number of alerts possible" (Baldor and Burns, 2014).

The Secretary of the Air Force referred to the this scandal as a "failure in integrity" and explained that integrity meant taking action whenever members see something that they believe is morally or ethically incorrect in their units, or among their peers, subordinates, or superiors (Lyle, 2014). However, she said she was troubled to find out that missileers felt pressure to score 100 percent all the time, because commanders often used test scores as the primary – or sometimes only factor – in promoting officers (Burns, 2014). She conceded that the tests had taken on such an important role in their eyes that missileers felt that getting anything less than 100 percent on them could put their entire careers in jeopardy (Baldor and Burns, 2014). In her opinion, they did not cheat to pass the test—"they cheated because they felt driven to get 100 percent" (Baldor and Burns, 2014). This fact has led some to believe that that pressure to be perfect seems to have driven some missileers to cheat and forced others in their units, possibly even their commanders, to look the other way (Burns, 2014). Cooper (2014) tells us that "current and former missileers described a surreal circular dance in which crew members routinely cheated on tests, got promoted to higher rank, and then officially announced their zero tolerance of cheating, all while looking the other way." The CDI concluded that leadership's demand of unit-wide perfection on the test while "tacitly condoning" acts that "take care" of

crewmembers who might otherwise fall short of the expected perfect result blurred "the line between acceptable help and unacceptable cheating" (Burns, Flawed Leadership, 2014).

B. Case Study 2: CGOs' Perspective on the Ethical Health of the Force

The CDI clearly shows that missile launch officers were feeling pressured to achieve and maintain unrealistic standards. To get a better understanding of the prevalence of this problem throughout the Service (beyond the missileer community), the Think Tank Group conducted peer interviews of Air Force members across the Service's rank structure and specialty code areas. Among those interviewed were two intelligence officers assigned under the Air Force Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Agency (AFISRA); a logistics readiness officer under Air Combat Command (ACC); five Acquisitions Officers assigned to different major commands (MAJCOMS); five AETC instructor pilots at different training bases; and captains attending SOS Class 14C.

Intelligence Officer Interviews

In the Think Tank Group interviews of the three AFISRA intelligence officers (14N), the first 14N compared their unit's test taking methodologies to that of the approach taken by the officers involved in the earlier described Malmstrom case. Additionally, this 14N stated that there was significant pressure from their leadership—mostly the director of operations and the training shop—to pass quarterly currency tests. Because their intelligence unit conducted 24/7/365 deployed-in-place operations, the 14N reported that their unit's leadership encouraged "crew personnel" to memorize the answers to the test. They explained that there was an answer bank provided on the unit's shared drive. While no actual test questions were provided, studying the answer bank, rather than the guidance publications, more than made it possible for personnel to recognize the answers on a multiple choice test. The 14N believed that their leadership was

using the rationalization of understanding the demanding work schedules of crewmembers to justify this action. Since no questions were being shared, the 14N stated that it was a commonly accepted and encouraged practice. However, this intelligence officer admits that they did not believe that their unit's approach toward taking the currency tests met the original intent for taking them. The 14N added that, although the unit's commander never directly encouraged use of this method, members who failed their currency tests were pulled off of crew and given a Letter of Reprimand for failure to meet standards. The 14N said that this "over-punishment" directly pressured people to at least review the answer bank, even if they had been studying the publications as required of them in order to excel on the tests.

The first 14N interviewed strongly believed that their unit's leadership was only concerned "with meeting their numbers to make the unit look good." They said that their commander would continually pass up the chain of command that their unit was able to produce more imagery products per hour than the unit actually could. The 14N added that this number would go up every quarter, while their unit's manning level would be going down. As a flight commander for one of the imagery crews, the 14N was unsure of where the squadron commander was getting these figures from, as it was never discussed at their unit's staff meetings. They believed that this increased requirement in target allocation for each analyst shifted the orientation of the unit from a quality to a quantity mindset. The 14N believed that the supported units receiving their products received sub-par imagery and analysis as a result of that change. The 14N said that they voiced their concerns to the DO about it and assumed it was being passed up their chain of command, but that they never approached their commander directly about it.

The second 14N reported, in the months leading up to a major compliance inspection, that the entire unit was advised that they could be called upon to take a no-notice Intelligence Oversight (IO) test. To prepare the unit for this, the unit IO monitors passed out small reference cards during a commander's call to help everyone study. The commander told the squadron to study them, and reference them during the actual test if necessary. However, if they did so, the commander warned Airmen keep the information hidden. The 14N expressed that they did not see the cards themselves as a violation of integrity, but said they felt "awkward" when their commander told the unit to "keep the cards hidden" during the test. The 14N maintained that it was never made clear whether or not members were allowed to have a reference card, but that the commander's advice was still perceived to be unethical.

The second 14N continued that, during a feedback session, the same commander encouraged them to start working on their Squadron Officer School (SOS) by correspondence. This intelligence officer stated that, during the feedback session, the commander encouraged them to "check *dirtypurple* [a website] for the gouge." The 14N noted that, in a separate conversation, their flight commander told them to do the same thing—to check a public website for answers to the SOS correspondence tests. The 14N admitted to going to the website, but said they were unable to find useful information about SOS on it. However, they reported that they saw course material for higher levels of Professional Military Education (PME) on the website, namely for Air Command and Staff College (ACSC) as well as for Air War College (AWC). The 14N contended that, "this isn't something new. This stuff is from all the older guys, like our commanders, who set this site up and started posting gouge on it. This is happening at all levels. Not just with the CGOs."

A third intelligence officer reported that their DO ordered them to hastily dispose of excess chemicals used to process film from the U-2 by dumping them down the sink because there was going to be an inspection, and the unit needed to be in compliance. The officers did not comply with the order, because it violated standards for disposal of hazardous material, but they have no account of what happened to the excess chemicals.

Logistics Readiness Officer Interview

The Think Tank Group next conducted an interview with a logistics readiness officer (LRO) assigned to an ACC unit. The LRO felt that their unit was undermanned and overworked. The LRO said that their commander's solution to the problem was taking a stance of "plausible deniability." The LRO reported that their commander told them to ensure the accomplishment of the mission and, as long as they accomplished the mission and their means of doing so was legal, that he or she did not need to know how it was done.

Acquisition Officer Interviews

In the third set of interviews, the Think Tank Group questioned five acquisitions officers assigned to various MAJCOMs. Similar to the intelligence officer's testimony, four of the five acquisition officers admitted their unit's shared drive contained answers to tests as well as to course assignments needed to receive and maintain certifications within the acquisition career field. Although they acknowledged that those practices were clearly against Defense Acquisition University rules, members of their units did not view their actions as morally or ethically questionable because their practices were commonplace in their units and encouraged by their leadership.

The fifth acquisition officer reported that his leadership required him to report any "dead" program as "green" in order to continue receiving funding for those programs. The officer's loyalty to his leadership and his unit, and his fear of reprisal obligated him to comply.

Executive Officer Interviews

One pilot who served as the Operations Group executive officer and another who served as the executive officer for a squadron commander agreed that there were multiple times when their bosses would readily say "yes" to their group and wing commanders' taskings in staff meetings, only to go back to their squadrons to assess whether or not their units could accomplish the task. Furthermore, both agreed that their commanders would often come up with ways to "fudge numbers" to report that a metric was "green" when it really was not, or even if the commander did not know what the real status of the metric was. When a metric was not achieved, the commanders would often tell the shop chiefs that they wanted to see them green without questioning why they were not attained to begin with.

Instructor Pilot Interviews

The Think Tank Group conducted its final interviews with five AETC instructor pilots (IPs) who spoke in ways that suggested that they had resigned themselves to accepting the reality of the less-than-ethically-ideal situations in which they found themselves at work. One common theme expressed by the IPs was that there had not been a proportional decrease in the number of students cut as flying hours and resources were cut—forcing them to cut corners in order to get their respective missions accomplished while pleasing their leadership. The pilots all admitted to either logging, or knowing of others who logged, flying hours not actually flown. All IPs also admitted to knowing of other IPs giving students the answers to weekly proficiency tests in order to maintain the flying schedule and placate their senior officers.

SOS Class 14C Interview

These case studies and interviews point to differing definitions of integrity. To better assess this possible disconnect from a CGO perspective, fourteen captains from an SOS class were asked to individually define integrity. Some said it was an internal feeling of what is right and wrong, while the vast majority stated or agreed with their peers that it was "doing the right thing, even when no one is looking." One CGO added that integrity also includes holding others to the expected standard of integrity. Further discussion arose from this question where, in general, it was made clear that this group felt that holding others accountable for their actions was not the first thought that came to mind when defining integrity.

C. Case Study 3: Leadership Perspective on the Ethical Health of the Force

SOS 14C Think Tank Group 3 also conducted interviews and held discussions with a group of students attending the Senior Non-Commissioned Officer (SNCO) Academy and former commanders attending Air War College (AWC) in an attempt to gain a leadership perspective on this issue. One commonality noted by both groups was that the ethical and moral problems in recent years occur no more frequently than they have in the past.

SNCO Academy Interviews

In the focus group with SNCOs, a first sergeant provided an example where an Airman made the choice to sign a travel voucher on behalf of an officer in order to get the voucher processed quickly. The Airman knew forging someone's signature was unethical behavior; however, they viewed their action as the right thing to do in order to expedite mission accomplishment. The SNCOs collectively agreed that getting the mission done often challenges the moral integrity of Airmen. It was noted that Airmen learn this lesson of accomplishing the mission at all costs at basic training where unrealistic demands are levied upon them and they

must choose where to cut corners in order accomplish all required tasks. When they enter active duty, this lesson is further enforced when they learn how to prioritize duties, and then are taught by peers and leaders the necessity of cutting corners in order to complete their work.

Another observation made by this SNCO focus group was that unit-level discussion about maintaining and improving one's individual moral and ethical health only occur when the lack of these traits failed the mission in a visible way (e.g. with an airmen forging a signature). The SNCOs continued that often times any addresses made by commanders about improving the unit's ethical standards are done so with a negative or threatening tone—only one or two of these SNCOs were able to provide examples of when ethics and/or morals were talked about or encouraged during a commander's call where an example of failure to adhere to those standards did not precede or follow the discussion.

AWC Interviews

A focus group of former commanders attending AWC was compiled and asked what their thoughts were on the ethical and moral climate of the Air Force. While they all admit these problems are not new, or in their opinion becoming worse, they agreed more could be done to promote the ethical health of the Service. Each of the commanders outlined successful ways that they were able to promote ethical decision making in their units. These implementations included the following: one-on-one initial mentoring sessions with every member in their unit with special emphasis on the Core Values; end-of-week formations emphasizing "making good choices" using specific stories of where Core Values went right or wrong; and encouraging their unit to follow them on Twitter and Facebook. Through this latter medium, comments were made to promote an ethical lifestyle and encourage responsible choices by service members (e.g. Friday night Tweets to the effect of "I've had a few beers but I've got a plan… do you?").

Finally, an overarching point of emphasis by the group was simply being more visible in your unit in general and willing to get to know your people on an individual basis. One of the commanders voiced their concern that programs do not exist outside of initial training and professional military education (PME) that continually educate and promote ethical decision-making. It was agreed upon by other commanders that more emphasis should be placed in this area. The ethical health of the Air Force was compared to the physical or mental health of the Service. Observations were made that programs exist to maintain each of these wellness pillars in our force well-beyond initial training and PME, but that in the day-to-day lives of and execution of duties by Airmen, the average military member has no structure in place to maintain or improve his or her moral and/or ethical health.

Each of the commanders agreed that they felt they had the proper education and tools available to teach their force about the Core Values. They also agreed that with this particular issue, an outsourced approach is not recommended. It was stated by one of the commanders that people often think of the inspector general (IG), legal office, or the chaplain as the offices that should be championing this effort, but that this is the something commanders should take on themselves, since they are the ones that ultimately set the tones of and standards for their units.

SECTION IV. ANALYSIS

Operating in today's "do more with less" Air Force has brought on a pattern of behavior in Airmen of all ranks where the mentality is to do whatever it takes to get the job done. This culture conflicts with the prioritization of the Core Values. As the CGO interviews highlight, the current Service culture demands excellence (defined as mission success) and Airmen are challenged to put their integrity on the line to achieve it.

Some common themes stand out from the results of the CGO interviews and leadership focus groups:

1. Commanders at the *squadron level* are perceived by CGOs and SNCOs to be the ones who are encouraging unethical behavior, ignoring violations, or setting the tone for an unethically operating unit.

2. Like the tests in the ICBM community, there is a perception that testing, inspections, or evaluations do not assess the quality and ability of the Airman. This issue was explicitly cited by captains in the intelligence and pilot communities. When such evaluations are decoupled with operational reality, they lose legitimacy in the eyes of those being evaluated, thus leading to greater temptation to sacrifice integrity.

3. Airmen at all levels are feeling the pressure to meet the metric or check the box in order to facilitate the unit's mission success. There are some instances where doing what is right and doing what is right for the mission conflict and Airmen are not given the appropriate guidance or top-cover to make ethical decisions in these cases. Additionally, there is a perception of a "one mistake Air Force." When looking at the Airman's Creed, the last line, and the line that all Airmen shout out is "…and I WILL NOT fail!" The last line in this creed, as well as the perception of excellence before integrity (through "unfair" or "overly harsh" punishments) provides added pressure and the incentive to continue with this trend, rather than confront it. These mixed messages make the struggle that Airmen face when balancing competing priorities more complex.

4. The definition of integrity readily accepted by the Air Force does not address integrity beyond the scope of the individual. The vast majority of CGOs defined integrity as "doing what is right, even when no one else is looking," as described in AFI 1-1. This definition does not

provide any guidance on how members should have personal integrity, or should stand up for or enforce it wherever they see it lacking in Service.

5. The Air Force lacks programs or avenues that encourage or facilitate the maintenance of ethical health. Where programs exist to not only attain but maintain each of the four pillars of wellness in the Air Force (emotional, physical, spiritual, and social), currently the Service only has programs in place to attain ethical health (namely accession training and PME). Commanders need to promote an environment where the ethical wellness of their people and their unit is consistently being maintained and improved, not only when a high-visibility failure occurs—but always.

6. Despite the lack of formal programs to address the maintenance of the moral health of the Service, commanders felt that they have the ability to promote the ethical health of their units. Commanders also felt that the best approaches were ones where the commander was directly involved in the process and this education was not "out-sourced" to other persons or agencies.

Consequently, the evidence discussed above demonstrates that the Air Force lacks a common understanding of its own Core Values and how they apply to one's duties. The failure to appropriately prioritize and align the "mission" with "integrity" has led to a crisis within the ranks, where cutting corners and striving for the appearance of perfection on inspections and evaluations has become common, if not standard. Based on the numerous interviews and case studies detailed above, it is clear that the cheating scandal at Malmstrom AFB was not an isolated event. These problems that led to nearly 100 Air Force officers being disciplined for academic cheating exist, to some extent, in nearly every command in every career field. The Service is entrusted with the awesome responsibility of protecting the nation's way of life, its

security, its safety by flying, fighting and winning in air, space and cyberspace. Its members' repeated violations of our force's ethical standards not only undermine its ability to accomplish its responsibilities, it also damages the confidence the American public has in the Air Force to effectively execute its mission.

Accordingly, as stated above, one of the root causes identified in the cheating scandal at Malmstrom AFB was the ever-expanding obstacle of "doing more with less." The increase in additional duties, which is the result of a high ops-tempo and a decrease in manpower caused by force reduction measures, has brought about a Service culture where many Airmen are struggling to decide whether to maintain their integrity or get the job done. With pressure from commanders and supervisors to get the job done, the tacit message becomes "at any cost." When squadron commanders say "yes" to their group and wing commanders' taskings in staff meetings, only to go back to their unit to assess whether or not their squadron can accomplish the task, it sends a fundamentally dishonest message and perpetuates a culture of "yes men" and unrealistic expectations. If that squadron commander overpromised his boss, he often resets priorities in the squadron to get the job done, sometimes at heavy costs to the mission and people he leads, when he could have easily told the superior commander that he would let him or her know after he had time to assess his squadron's capabilities. In such a climate, coupled with the high demand placed on junior officers (i.e. balancing regular duties with training, additional duties, advanced education, travel, supervising, personal finance and family), it is little wonder why so many junior officers choose to get the job done with little regard for getting it done correctly.

For the sake of organizational success, Airmen are taught the necessity of bending rules in order to get things accomplished. Rather than being honest with leadership, Airmen will often

allow the line to be blurred between right and wrong when it comes to getting the job done due to their commander's insistence on making everything green. However, this practice distorts reality: "green" slides may not mean that the metric is really "green." The drive to have good reports has far-reaching impact. Failure to accurately report performance is not only an integrity violation with respect to the lie being told to the commander, but it is also a violation with respect to misinformation being provided to the taxpayer as to how his or her tax dollars are being spent. Performance of the Service's mission is also reported to Congress, which decides how to allocate funding based on those numbers. The Service artificially inflating capabilities and inaccurately reporting performance measures therefore puts it in an unfortunate position where it creates a misconception in the eyes of the Congress that it can do more with less—because it claims it can.

SECTION V. RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION

Acknowledging that there are no easy solutions to this problem is paramount to setting forth with any recommended Course of Action. The root causes of the Air Force's inability to adhere to its own Core Values reveal that the chosen path will require accountability at all levels, and is dependent on strong leadership at all levels, especially at the squadron command. The recommended Course of Action will emphasize the importance of living the Core Values 24/7/365; it will not only ensure a common understanding of them, but also their applicability in Airmen's daily lives and routines; and it will prevent leadership from losing track of the Service's ethical climate in the future.

Consequently, it is important to note that Air Force Instruction 1-1 tells us, that in order to achieve its mission of "fly, fight and win," the Service needs to be a trusted and reliable Joint partner with its sister services—known for integrity in all of its activities. It also states that Air

Force members' commitment to integrity leads the way for others to follow in practicing the highest standards of personal and professional conduct (Dunford and Tower, 2003). The "Air Force Core Values Guru's Guide" emphasizes that success or failure of the Core Value is determined by the behavior and example of service leaders—from the Office of the Secretary of the Service to the flight level (Dunford and Tower, 2003). Therefore, any instituted changes should focus on improving leadership's ability to instill and enforce them. The scope of our recommended Course of Action is focused on the squadron commander as he or she is first command authority leader who still has direct contact with the majority of his or her force. This Course of Action is broken down into three distinguishable parts.

A. Utilize Lowest Command Level to Promote the Core Values Early and Often

The Air Force is at a disadvantage starting from Day 1 of Basic Training because it has no idea what values are instilled in a trainee, or whether or not those values align with those that it desires in its service members. While the Service cannot control if or how parents or primary school educators instill moral virtues in trainees, it must do whatever it can to shape the values it desires of Airmen in its service members. "The key to creating a total quality organization is first to create a total quality person who uses a true north 'compass' that is objective and external, that reflects natural laws or principles, as opposed to values that are subjective and internal" (Covey, 1992). By focusing on facilitating the development of better Airmen with strong, 'true north' moral compasses, the Service as an organization will improve. "Simply giving them a new set of rules with warnings and punishment will not change them…. We need to define and teach moral behavior—both public and private. We must do this repeatedly and consistently, giving it major emphasis" (Dierker, 1997). While there is little that senior leaders in the Air Force can do to ensure that Airmen come into it with a strong sense of morality and

ethics, changes to training, education and leadership could facilitate the instilling of the ethics and morals necessary to achieve an organization where each Airman embodies and exemplifies the Core Values.

A commander on the field of battle would be ill-equipped to lead if his or her troops did not trust that he or she gave them the necessary tools to survive and succeed. Airmen need to develop a strong foundation based on the Core Values to accomplish the mission and will need to be confident that that foundation is on firm ground before commanders can ask them to put their lives on the line to prove their commitment to him or her or to accomplishing the mission. The squadron commander, as the first line commander in most Air Force units, is the most appropriate person to provide education on character and on virtue to young Airmen. Success in such a task will require individual and personal contact as previously discussed by graduated squadron commanders.

Some squadrons are much larger than others and face-to-face contact is asking a lot of squadron commanders, but this is the lowest level practicable for Air Force leadership to facilitate the development of desired virtues and values among Airmen. Furthermore, it appears that many of the good squadron commanders have taken it upon themselves, without any requirement, to conduct these initial face-to-face contacts with their Airmen. A common theme discussed in the Air War College focus group was of how many of those former commanders found face-to-face contact helpful in setting the tone for the climate in their squadrons. To be effective, they suggested that the face-to-face discussions about the Core Values with Airmen by the squadron commanders should be whenever the Airman arrives at the unit, rather than when the commander takes command. The commander can then set forth expectations and priorities in the squadron while explaining why those expectations and priorities support the Core Values.

The squadron commander can show each of his or her Airmen how the Core Values apply to the job and outside of it. Difficult scenarios of choices between right and wrong course of action should be discussed with the Airman—with him or her expected to explain how their hypothetical choice would align with the Core Values. Through these exercises, the commander can also evaluate the Airman's internal values and motivations to better gauge and provide the appropriate level of education and supervision needed by the Airman for his or her full ethical development.

Responsibility would lie with the group commander to ensure his squadron commanders are providing a specified minimum amount of mentoring. If squadron commanders cannot find the time or are unwilling to mentor their squadron, then group commanders should be encouraged to find someone who will.

B. Require Climate Assessments and 360 Degree Feedback to Ensure Integrity Issues are Identified and Addressed as soon as Possible

Currently, unit leaders use climate surveys as a snapshot of the unit's morale. However, there is no obligation for a leader to take action or responsibility regarding the results. Logic would dictate that a good leader would seek to improve whatever state the unit is in, and utilize any tool available to him or her to assess and address the results; however, this is not always the case.

Climate surveys can be a very useful tool and should be given more validity. The numerous extra duties in the Air Force today make many Airmen cringe at the thought of another CBT or survey, but the recommended climate assessment is key in evaluating the moral health and ethical climate in the squadron. It should be prioritized over other evaluations and measurements. Climate assessments should be used as part of required 360 degree feedback

process that provides squadron commanders with perspective from their subordinates. They should also serve as a means through which group and wing commanders can keep abreast of the organizational culture in units that may be off of their radar. This is necessary for several reasons: because it may be the only chance subordinates have to report on how they think their squadron leadership is performing, thereby giving them a voice to air grievances within the unit or to praise good leadership; and because it will also ensure that those units and their commanders are not blindsided by rampant integrity violations as was the case with the ICBM leadership and community this last winter.

Group commanders need to require that their squadrons complete climate surveys on an annual basis, preferably in line with the squadron commander's assignment and midway point in command. Then the survey data should to be reviewed by group commanders, with squadron commanders being debriefed on the results. If these surveys are done correctly, it will give group commanders another piece of evidence to use in rating their squadron commanders, thus incentivizing solid leadership on the part of those commanders and preventing the types of toxic organizational climates that have been discussed in this paper. Thus, it is important to emphasize that these surveys should cover a wide variety of areas, while still capturing key areas of interest. For example: unit integrity issues, leadership performance/expectations, possible hostile working environments, and the effects of the ops tempo, all of which were found to be causes for the integrity valuations discussed above.

The climate assessment surveys are a practical way to open the dialogue between commander and Airmen. The results will show how the commander is perceived to live by the Core Values and how he or she holds those found violating the Core Values accountable. In that sense, the commander's response to the feedback is the most important step. Airmen are

receptive to leadership when they know that problems will be addressed. The commander can send a strong message through an appropriate response to the feedback by reinforcing the good, and fixing the bad. He or she should use the feedback as an opportunity to publically reward honesty. Airmen coined for telling the hard truth creates a climate where integrity thrives.

Perhaps most importantly, commanders can use the results from the climate assessment surveys to address any mixed-messages they may be sending when forced to balance competing priorities. "Over not through" is one message heard loud and clear by Airmen: figure out how to get around the problem rather than addressing it head on. This way of thinking epitomizes the focus on the end of getting the job done, while the means are secondary. The institutional goals of the unit at the squadron level perpetuate this message. Squadron commanders are accountable for countless matrices for which the overall goal is to be "green." However, there is no metric to account for whether or not a squadron or Airman is "green," "yellow" or "red" with respect to having integrity. Squadron commanders can use the climate assessment to do this stop-light-chart for themselves and for their units, as well as as a tool to ensure that their actions are aligned with the Core Values.

C. Refocus Education on Core Values to Illustrate the Primacy of Integrity

The evidence demonstrates that a recommitment to the Core Values is necessary. This should be accomplished by ensuring there is a common understanding of what each of the Core Values means to the Air Force. "Integrity" is defined in AFI 1-1, and by nearly every Airman as, "doing what's right, even when no one is looking." However, that definition does not set Airmen up for success. How are Airmen able to understand what "right" means when commanders send mixed messages about their priorities? It permits rationalization of moral failure because "doing what's right" can mean "doing what needs to be done in order to get the

job done." Furthermore, the Air Force's definition of integrity should be full-spectrum; integrity calls for action, not only when there is no one looking, but also when someone is looking. Taking accountability for mistakes or standing up to a commander's insistence on achieving perfection requires integrity, often when there are others watching.

To achieve a common understanding of the term that improves the moral health of the Service, integrity should be defined as being "courageously honest, despite the consequences." This change in thinking about the idea of having integrity promotes the virtue of moral courage, and teaches Airmen that accomplishing the mission and exemplifying the Core Values are not competing ideals. This will empower Airmen to call out their wingmen or even their commander for cutting corners. At the same time, "excellence" should not be understood to mean "perfection." Too often, metrics drive the definition of excellence. "Excellence" cannot be relative; a moving target only invites integrity violations. Rather, "excellence" should be understood as "performing at the best of my abilities." For the Core Values to have any meaning, senior leaders should be prepared to say that integrity comes above all else in the Air Force—for without it, there can be no excellence, and pursuing excellence at its expense is selfish.

To illustrate the primacy of integrity, the Air Force should adopt the equilateral triangle as an education tool. The visualization of the new way of thinking about integrity in the Air Force, with integrity at the pinnacle of the triangle supported by service and excellence, will resonate with Airmen, who see violations of integrity daily, as a symbol of the Service's seriousness about the importance of having it. The triangle mirrors the force structure, illustrating that integrity must encompass the entirety of senior leadership and that, without it, the Total Force is incomplete.

Figure 1: Proposed Core Values education tool visual example

There is nothing wrong with the Core Values; it is the lack of a common understanding and a misplaced focus as it relates to them that has caused the prioritizing of the ends (perfection) over the means (integrity). This simple education tool shows that the Air Force understands that the problems detailed above resulted from a culture with misplaced priorities; the focus on the means above the ends signifies that the Service is committed to achieving results not at the expense of its morals but instead are in-line with them.

The triangle also addresses another problem: the lack of proactive leadership in discussing the Core Values. Currently, the Core Values are something that is only discussed in depth when negative incidents occur or headlines appear that highlight the Air Force's shortcomings in adhering to them. Discussions regarding the Core Values need to be a part of our everyday lives so that Airmen can internalize them and know how to apply them in different situations. When the Air Force removed all offensive material from unit walls a while back because they were counterproductive to fostering safe and professional work environments, it failed to replace those images with something positive. The Service should replace the old material with images of the triangle and Airmen living the Core Values to show how integrity is

the foundation of well-balanced Air Force life. The Service's promoting of the Core Values will help reenergize it and re-instill pride among its service members in not only what it does, but also how it does it—with unwavering integrity.

SECTION VI. CONCLUSION

The Malmstrom CDI and multiple examples of integrity violations that students in SOS Class 14C, the SNCO Academy and Air War College provided show the pervasiveness of a problem caused by service leaders sending mixed messages about their priorities as they relate to the Core Values, thereby forcing Airmen to prioritize task and objectives with little guidance. While the Malmstrom cheating scandal made a big wave in the national media, this paper has made it clear that it was just the tip of the iceberg. There are more Service-related headlines waiting to make the front page of USA Today and the New York Times and this paper has made it evident in just two-weeks-worth of research and interviews conducted by a handful of CGOs.

At the same time, the universal complaint among service members that the struggle to reconcile competing priorities among the Core Values is caused, or at least exacerbated, by the necessity to "do more with less" tells us that senior leaders must address the question of: "what is going to give if there has to be trade-offs among the Core Values?" Currently, it is clear that, when Airmen are forced to answer that question, the answer is that integrity is the first to waver. The gravity of this problem demands that swift and deliberate action be taken to reinforce the Service's commitment to its Core Values. However, while this paper proposes a Course of Action that is specific, actionable, sustainable, and effective, a possible solution to the crippling effects of the "doing more with less" conditions that is outside the scope of this paper is to adopt the U.S. Army's practice of cutting units (Rhodes, 2014). "Reducing the number of military units fielded would allocate reductions across most of DoD's budget. Units that remained in the

force would continue to be funded at levels that have produced today's highly capable forces" (Congressional Budget Office, 2014). Proper manning across all units will counter the challenge Airmen must overcome of conditions being set to achieve X while the expected outcome from them is Y (Carr, 2014). Until force structure becomes balanced with the mission requirements, it is likely that cutting corners, pencil whipping, and outright cheating will continue in the Air Force.

The evidence shows that the Air Force gets what it asks for—it is understood that the priority is the end, which for many commanders is simply to obtain "green slides," with little regard to the means. It is difficult to expect Airmen to perform with integrity when commanders perpetuate an asymmetric focus on results. However, it cannot be left unsaid that the solution to this problem is a double-edged sword. The recommended course of action challenges leaders to accept the consequences of an honest Air Force. No one knows what such a fighting force would look like. The COA requires critical analysis of what it would mean to the Service if all Airmen were courageously honest, despite the consequences. In an Air Force expected to do more with less, if something has to give, is the Service prepared to sacrifice mission accomplishment for integrity?

Ultimately, the Core Values are intended to help guide Airmen in choosing the path of moral courage and virtue when faced with life and work's toughest decisions. However, the mere identification of them is not enough to prevent breaches of integrity or to foster the internalizing of their principles. A more robust and uniform understanding of them with emphasis on living those values every day from senior leadership through to the most junior Airmen is necessary to realign the Service with its ethical principles. A departure from the risk adverse culture of "yes men" must occur, or the courageous few who stand up to the integrity

violations that have become pervasive in the Service will be silenced. By refocusing the emphasis on the Core Values, Airmen will understand that "excellence" is not cheating to obtain a perfect score on an evaluation; that pencil whipping a TO in order to help the commander look good on an inspection is not service before self—it's cowardly; and that integrity is being courageously honest, despite the consequences.

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